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Work Requirements

2. The situation of women in present day Latvia is very hard: they must not only do all the housework but also have paying jobs in order to help support their families. More over, there is a rule that all women who do not have small children under 10 years of age have to work. This rule does not seem to apply to all Soviet women, e.g., the wives of the Soviet officers stationed in Liepaja, but it is enforced strictly with regard to Latvians. Even if a woman has small children, an investigation by the house management determines whether the husband earns enough to support the family; if not, the wife has to go to work. A friend of mine who is a dressmaker used to work at home in order to stay with her children. The house management decided that the husband's salary was too small to support the family and the woman was told to join a dress-making artel in two days or else. No specific threat was made, but the woman went. [redacted] women sitting at home are suspected of speculation.
3. "Women do the same jobs as men: they are chauffeurs, transport workers, tractor and combine drivers. In the factories they do the unskilled coarse work: they fetch and carry, cart raw materials or refuse on wheelbarrows, carry beams in the sawmills, even work as timber floaters. Some women work in the administration, chiefly as clerks.

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There are also female militiamen. In Liepaja there is even a female lieutenant of the fire brigade. In private she is always well dressed, and it is said that her salary is 1000 rubles. She must be a CP member as nobody can obtain a position of trust without such membership. A woman working in a sawmill, for example, never earns more than 450 rubles, for which she can afford to buy only the worst food and no clothes.

4. "Women may absent themselves from work only if they produce a doctor's certificate; it is quite impossible to take a day off to attend to family affairs. If a woman is pregnant she gets 27 days off before the birth and 27 days after. Should her place of work be sufficiently close to home she may go home for one or two hours at noon to feed her baby after those 27 days. This may be done for two months. When the baby is three months old it is no longer supposed to require its mother's care. It is supposed to be left at a creche while the mother is at work.
5. The Latvians, however, seldom leave their children at creches or kindergartens. While they are at work they engage some old woman to look after the children. Such old women, without incomes, usually do this for their food only. Sometimes several families in a house club together to engage an old woman. The creches and kindergartens are too expensive for the ordinary mortal, especially if one has several children: it costs 70 rubles per month to keep a four-year-old child in one. There is no medical examination of the children in the creches in Liepaja. The sick and the healthy play together. Nobody makes them change when they get their feet wet. Usually there is a kindergarten at every place of work. If it has 50-60 children, there are two nurses to attend to them. The bulk of the children in the kindergartens are little Soviets, for the Soviet women leave them there for convenience's sake even if they are not working.
6. "Although work is supposed to give independence, the Latvian women do not value this independence. They all say: 'Formerly only the men of the family used to work and we had everything; now we all slave together and do not even earn enough for proper food.' Of course, the Latvian women are glad that despite everything there is work available, for without it they would starve outright. All the better jobs go to Communists and the best to Soviets. In 1949

The entire management was Soviet and most inefficient, but as it was appointed by the CP town committee nothing could be done.

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Clothing

7. "At work the women usually wear quilted cotton coats of Soviet make, so called fufaikas, cotton trousers and rubber boots (heellies, unlined, hard on the feet, but costing only 60 rubles). On Sundays, they still try to be as nicely dressed as possible in their poverty. Everybody sews at home, patching, mending, and turning old clothes endlessly. The women help each other with such work. Everybody tries to earn a little money on the side: on the black market they buy wool stolen from some factory (none of it in the shops), paying 120 rubles per kilogram. A jumper or cardigan knitted from wool fetches up to 350 rubles in a so-called commission shop. Women also knit and sell handkerchiefs of wool and sell them. Handkerchiefs are made up of scraps of material and sold. There are no foundation garments for sale in the shops at all; brassieres are made up of scraps of material and sold for 40-50 rubles. Some women earn a few rubles by mending runs in stockings. Some go to the villages on Sundays and try to buy a few eggs to sell at a profit in the towns. Others pick berries and mushrooms in the forests and sell them on the black market. Some make paper flowers or draw coloured postcards (unavailable) to sell. Everybody tries to turn a penny somehow.

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8. "Interest in fashions persists. In Riga there is a Fashion Centre where good artists draw nice models. But there is no material to make them up. Somehow one manages to know about foreign fashions. A fashion paper finds its way to Latvia via East Germany; women memorize the dresses worn by the stars in foreign films. The Soviet-made clothes in the shops are for work only as they are horrible. For Sundays only home made clothes are worn. Shoes are not bought from the stores, they are too horrible. One orders them from a private shoemaker every fourth or fifth year at a price of 400-450 rubles. During the day such a shoemaker works in an artel, at nighttime in his home he makes shoes for private clients. The necessary leather he steals from his artel or buys on the black market.

9. "Everybody steals something somewhere in Latvia today and the Soviets are the boldest thieves. It is most often from them that one can buy things. Everybody knows who sells what. Punishments for theft are heavy. In the Liepaja sugar factory people have received five to seven years of forced labour for stealing 200 gr of sugar. Three men over 60 from my native village who together had sold about 100 kg fish on the black market, got seven years each. But nothing helps, one cannot live without stealing.

Attitudes:

10. "The life of a woman in Latvia is all work and very little sleep. Play does not enter at all except for the young unmarried ones. The day is spent in the following manner: rising at five or six at the latest, cooking breakfast, perfunctory house-cleaning, off to the job at 8, queuing for food or other goods from 4 to 7, cooking dinner and doing housework until 11-12 p.m. If something special is sold, such as flour, one has to start queuing in the middle of the night. The daily budget is 20 rubles for a single person and at least 30 or 60 rubles for a family of four.
11. "Latvian parents are having some difficulties with their children because of the latter's Communist indoctrination. Many Latvian children are now in the Pioneer and Komsomol organizations. In order to finish a secondary school and get decent work it is absolutely essential for a child to be a Komsomol member. The young people join but without conviction. The Soviets are perfectly well aware of this attitude and do not pay much attention to the Komsomol. They concentrate on the Pioneer organization in the hope of getting hold of the young children who have never seen free Latvia. All pioneers are taken to camps every summer for three or four weeks. Good food is provided, and real efforts are made to make the camps attractive. It is mainly through these camps that the children are lured to join the Pioneers. The application is submitted to the children, the consent of the parents is not asked. Parents do not dare forbid their children to join as this might come out and be dangerous. What they try to do is tell them about free Latvia and hint that the Soviets are not so good.
12. "No cases are known [redacted] of children having betrayed their parents. The parents are careful, of course. In the journal PIONEER the children are called upon to report all about home life but whenever anything forbidden goes on there (e.g. listening to VOA) the small children (under 10) do not understand and the older ones (over 10) are clever enough to know what may be told at school and what may not. The Latvian children are quite fierce nationalists and have tough fights with Soviet children. Without any explanations from their parents they see the inferiority of the Soviets to their own people. There are still plenty of children who of their own accord laugh at the Pioneers and call them 'red sheep'. Feelings about the Komsomol are not so strong. Everybody knows that membership is necessary for the sake of one's living. However, the country youth, who go only to elementary school, refuse to join the Komsomol.

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13. "What worries the Latvian parents much more than the political indoctrination of their children is that some are growing up into little rowdies because they must be left alone so much. With both parents at work, they run about in the streets and learn bad manner there. It is quite pathetic to see how hard the parents try not to let their children degenerate into the hooligans that the Soviet children are; hitherto they seem to have succeeded.

Appearance of Soviet Women in Latvia

14. [redacted] The Latvians cannot afford dresses made by a dressmaker; they make them at home. However, a Soviet major, for example, has a salary of 6000 rubles.
15. "As very little decent material can be found in the shops, the officers' wives buy it on the black market. The greatest black marketeers in Latvia are the wives of Soviet officers, especially those who have husbands stationed in East Germany. When they travel to and fro from East Germany, they are not searched as are ordinary people. They bring back loads of all sorts of merchandise, mostly textiles. On arrival they set up something like an unofficial shop, make up small batches of samples of their assortment and circulate these among their friends. My clients often came to me with such samples to ask my advice which to choose. The samples included wool, lace, silks, brocades, cloth of gold and silver, velvet - everything that can be got in the West. The average cost of a dress from such material is 2000 rubles plus the dressmaker's fee of 200 rubles.
16. "The Soviet women have no taste and no idea how to dress. They go to a dressmaker with material of a pattern that might at a stretch be made up into a housecoat, eg, red cotton with huge lilac flowers, and ask her to make a proper street dress out of it. Most of these Soviet women know that they have no dress sense, rely entirely on the dressmaker and take advice gratefully. They refuse even to look at the Moscow fashion papers and ask whether there are not any old French or German ones. What they like best are very full styles, voluminous both at the bust and from the waist down, with wide sleeves and a broad belt. They avoid low décolletages, thinking them immodest. Fullness suggests riches to them; what they want is opulence, not elegance. The colours must always be bright; they hardly ever order a dark dress. After one has somehow made a decent dress for them they spoil the whole effect by choosing the wrong hair-do and accessories. It is the usual thing to see a Soviet woman dressed, for example, in a lacy dress, beige shoes, mauve or yellow socks and a red handbag. Those who come from a stay in Germany have more cultivated tastes. They also wear foundation garments which the 'unspoiled' Soviet women never do, considering them inconvenient. They use old-fashioned garters to hold up their stockings. Their underwear is poor and never of silk. None possesses a slip or a petticoat.
17. "These Soviet ladies display their new finery at the Soviet clubs in Liepaja where dances and entertainments are frequent. A lot of drinking goes on. The ladies drink just as much as the men and are as noisy and disorderly. They frequently fight with their husbands in the street, using the most terrible abuse.
18. "The Soviet women go in for a lot of cosmetics and perfume. The Soviet-made face powder is coarse, and as the ladies use the lightest shades, often pure white, they look as if they had dipped their faces into a flour bin. A small bottle of decent perfume costs 100 rubles. This is expensive, so the Soviet women, who feel that they

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must walk in a cloud of perfume, often use cheap varieties. Even the men use perfume quite frequently. Because the Soviet cosmetics are of such bad quality, the Latvian women have abandoned makeup altogether.

19. "A permanent wave costs 20-30 rubles. As the appropriate oils are not available, ammonia is used as a substitute. It damages both scalp and hair so that the treatment can be used every second year only. The result is a crinkly coiffure, and that is how the Soviet women walk about. They seldom have their hair set, which costs five rubles. A Marcel wave costs 4.50 rubles. A manicure costs 3-5 rubles but the nail enamel is bad and does not last over two days.
20. "There are about ten beauty-parlours in Liepaja. They are patronized chiefly by the Soviets. The Latvians use their services only for special events, a wedding, etc. The girls at these parlours are badly paid: a manicure girl gets 200 rubles plus a small percentage; a hairdresser, 300. They all work privately at home in the evenings, in great secrecy."

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